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ABSTRACT

Sailing expeditions have played an important role in adventure provision for young people in Great Britain over many years. Adventure experiences under sail can achieve social and personal development goals similar to those of land-based adventure education programs. In addition, participants can earn certification in sailing skills. Most voyages last between 7 and 21 days; anything shorter is not long enough to realize the full benefit from the experience. An analysis of program objectives offers an insight into the motive and rationale for provision that will affect the style of the project. If "training" is used in the terminology, it can be concluded that the experience stresses the benefits of discipline and order. If "development" is used, the project may have a more distinct philosophy of youth-work and personal development. Four programs are examined. Two are single-sex programs for boys that stress responsibility and teamwork. A third is a mixed-sex program that stresses equality, fairness, understanding the needs and backgrounds of others, and awareness of the environment, in addition to responsibility and teamwork. A fourth program combines sailing adventures with land-based courses for young people at risk. Recently, providers of sailing adventures have become more receptive to modern ideas of personal and social development and have adapted their programs accordingly. If used within the context of supportive youth-work programs, sailing adventures offer unique challenges and experiences for personal and social development. (TD)

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The High Seas Adventure Context for Young People

by
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Fiona McCormack

The High Seas Adventure Context for Young People

Introduction

Sailing expeditions have played an important role in adventure provision for young people in Britain over many years. However, this area has been over-looked for the most part in academic research. In 1994 Dr Keith Bottomley, University of Hull, presented the findings of a detailed study of the Humberside Probation Service Sail Training Project to delegates at the National Association for Outdoor Education / Basecamp conference in Ambleside. His research demonstrated the opportunities and limitations of sailing adventures for young people at risk of offending. Although his conclusions suggest that no significant improvement in recidivism was found, the study demonstrated through individual feedback that there were many benefits in terms of improved self esteem and enhanced social skills.

The Adventure Environment

In the study ' Adventure Therapy' Gass (1993) concludes that

' Outward Bound and its derivative, wilderness therapy, can be seen as educational processes where adolescents are initiated into the prosocial values that form the basis of western culture' (Gass, 1993 :19)

This analysis of adventure experiences under sail will consider the possibility that similar social and personal development goals can be achieved in this environment.

Putnam and Hopkins (1993) provide a definition of adventure taken from Mortlock (1973) and suggest that adventure is

'a state of mind that begins with feelings of uncertainty about the outcome and always ends with feelings of enjoyment, satisfaction or elation about the successful completion of that journey' (Putnam and Hopkins, 1993:67)

The sailing environment certainly fulfils these criteria. However can the experience offer the benefits of social and personal development displayed by the land based adventure? The experiences of the Maiden Whitbread Round the World Race team member Jo suggest this may be possible;

' I've got confident - I never thought I would feel this good. I have also got some very dear friends, and had some fantastic times - as well as some sad ones. I feel that I have got to know myself and what I want from life' (Edwards & Madge,1990 :220)

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The Potential Outcomes from Sailing Adventures

Adventures under sail combine the benefits of residential projects factors such as destination and discovery. The environment offers an intense atmosphere to explore oneself. This may include relationships with others, perceptions of personal ability and other people's ability. Most voyages last for between 7 and 21 days, generally anything much shorter will not be long enough to realise the full benefit from the experience. A common feature for all sea going adventures is the unpredictability - weather dictates all of the conditions. On a ship, unlike many other adventures, sometimes things have to happen and there is no time to stop and reflect, there is a natural sense of urgency. Discipline can be imposed by the elements.

In order to establish a satisfactory picture of the role and purpose of sailing voyages it is important to analyse the objectives for a sample of British based projects. The objectives will offer an insight into the motive and rationale for provision that will, of course, affect the style of the project. If "training" is used in the terminology it is possible to conclude that the experience stresses the benefits of discipline and order. If "development" is used it is possible that the project has a more distinct philosophy of youth work and personal development programmes.

In Britain there are a diverse range of projects targeted at young people and it is therefore important to consider the stated aims of a sample of three sailing projects, the Sail Training Association (STA), the Ocean Youth Club (OYC) and the London Sailing Project in 1994. These organisations represent the larger providers and demonstrate different approaches for example the STA run two large Schooners that take a crew of 55 in a single sex environment. Their objective is to develop maturity and social awareness in young people. This is further developed to suggest that the schemes :

'offer an unparalleled opportunity to develop personal skills by combining a wide range of tasks with high levels of responsibility and team work.' (STA Brochure 1994)

Alternatively the London Sailing Project operates smaller vessels, particularly for London area boys and historically single sex crews. The project was founded by Lord Amory and aims to :

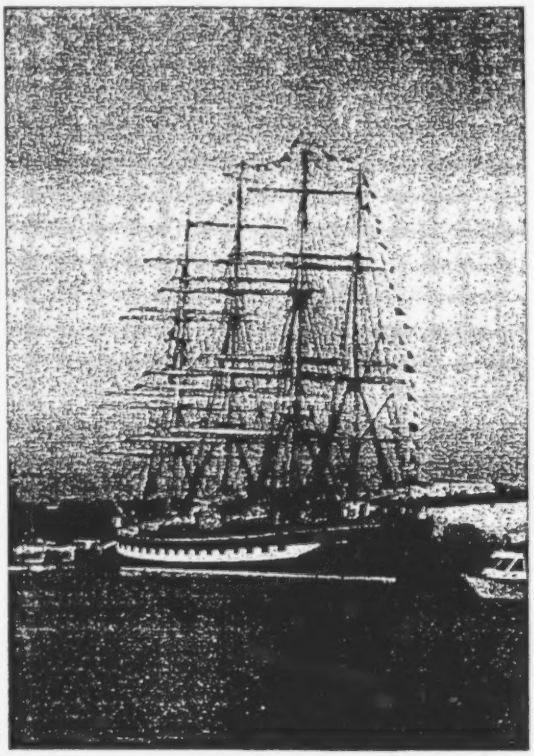
'*provide opportunities for boys to acquire those attributes of a seaman, namely; a sense of responsibility, resourcefulness and team work which will help them throughout their lives.*' (London Sailing Project, 1994)

Finally the Ocean Youth Club, which operates from many regional based vessels, provides for mixed crews of 12- 18 people. It exists to provide equality of opportunity for all young people to develop responsibility and knowledge about themselves, others and society. The enjoyment and adventure of life at sea can help young people to learn :

- A sense of equality and fairness

- Understanding of the needs and different backgrounds of others
- Responsibility for their own decisions and actions
- Teamwork and mutual trust
- Awareness of the environment (Ocean Youth Club, 1994)

Factors which determine the suitability of sailing adventures for individuals.



As with many adventure experiences there are choices to be made which may influence the range of outcomes for participants. The main considerations are size, crew structure, and management style. The largest provider in terms of boat size is the STA, which carry a medium sized community of 55 people. The young crew may not get to know all of these individuals and a more introverted personality may be inhibited by the large and strange environment. The largest provider , the OYC, specialises in smaller boats and groups of 12 - 18 people. These groups can be very claustrophobic but nobody can become 'lost' in crowd. Relationships in such a tight atmosphere have to be resolved and work.

Due to sea going traditions many sailing providers still offer a single sex environment. This is arguably less difficult to manage and will allow girls to be pushed to carry out all of the tasks. All male crews allow more successful bonding it has been suggested. Indeed, due to the very close living conditions some young people at risk may find the mixed crew too difficult to cope with and find that they lose out on other benefits by this preoccupation. Alternatively a mixed crew can forge greater respect and understanding of the needs, strength and emotions of the opposite sex.

Some boats still stress 'training' and discipline, others development and youth work. Some have uniformed staff and an obvious hierarchy, others are more open. The style of the organisation will affect the approach of the staff; although each staff member is different and boats under different leadership may operate slightly differently.

Most providers offer sailing from 14 to 21 years, others extend as far as 10 - 25 years but in separate sub groups. It is important to weigh up the benefits of either a wide age group or a smaller sub group. Wider age groups can help everyone to develop a better relationship with young people of different ages and demonstrate that age is not always important.

Most sailing providers cater for those who wish to book an entire boat or those who wish to send individuals to join a mixed crew. Another important factor determining the environment will be whether participants attend as part of a small group to join a larger group, fill an entire voyage or as an individual. By sending an individual it is argued that they will benefit from meeting new people from all walks of life , but this may be too much for a nervous and introverted young person with little self confidence. Small groups frequently will therefore over come this problem offering moral support whilst still requiring that they mix with a wider group. The problem with sending a small group is that individuals may avoid contact with others staying as a clique.

Alternatively sailing adventures provides an opportunity for youth workers to organise their own groups and go with them. This is an ideal way of using adventure training for personal development sessions, to build up to the experience and to witness at first hand the group's performance. It may be particularly suitable to achieve team building objectives from a new group of young people. However , the benefit of mixing with young people from different backgrounds will be sacrificed.

Measuring the outcomes from sailing adventures

Having considered the environment and the objectives it is important to review the outcomes of participation. From the sample of objectives it is possible to define some common ground for skills development:

Responsibility
Team Work
Personal / Social Skills

These clear areas are combined with domestic and sailing skills acquired. The use of sailing adventures can therefore be seen to offer young people the opportunity to develop in the following aspects :

Practical Sports Skills
Domestic Skills
Personal Development
Social Skills
Team Work

The skills identified will be offered through the environment, the activities and the leaders. Some skills will be practical taught skills which can be measured in terms of competency. These may include the sailing techniques involved in steering, hoisting, lowering and stowing sails. The successful candidate can, if desired, work towards a recognised certificate of competence for these skills awarded by the Royal Yachting Association. Domestic skills such as cooking and cleaning may be informally taught and can be more difficult to learn in the moving and cramped environment.

Less easily identified skills are frequently the result of observation, facing challenges or specific sessions. Many skills are developed simply by the opportunity to observe others, often leaders, in all aspects of the voyage. This element is particularly strong when the crew is of a mixed background and the staff are volunteers. Young people may alter their perceptions of classes or professions through observing them in a different role or environment.

Depending on the type of project chosen, it is possible to evaluate the results of the experience in several ways :

a. ***Certificates of Competencies***

Skills which can be assessed may result in certificates gained or log book entries completed. These will indicate the level to which sailing skills have been achieved. Some organisations also give successful completion certificates for the voyage itself., This will simply indicate that the young person has played a full role in the voyage. Sailing skills usually lead to the award of the Royal Yachting Association : Competent Crew Award, although experience and skills for this may take several voyages to achieve the certificate.

b. ***Appraisal Forms***

Many organisations will provide a formal assessment of the young person. This will vary from organisation to organisation in structure and content. These forms can be helpful for post course debriefing sessions.

c. ***Self Assessment***

Some organisations request that young people complete a questionnaire and short report on their evaluation of the experience. The feedback from these reports can again be useful in a post course debriefing. The use of self assessment has been further enhanced by the use of pre voyage evaluation, this will give a before and after insight.

Sailing Adventures as part of expeditions

Finally it is interesting to see how the sailing media can be used to enhance the adventure expedition. Sailing ships were the traditional method of transport, particularly for an island nation such as Britain. They offer many unique features for youth work, in terms of the environment and the access they give to expeditions and exploration. Many adventure projects can be enhanced by using sailing ships as the method of transport, for example a voyage around the small island of Skye off Scotland , could include some hill walking, abseiling, a bivy and a raft racing project. Sailing ships provide a great base for all sorts of long and short duration expeditions. The use of integrated sailing projects has been introduced and many organisation now offer the experience as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme expedi-

tions. Other organisations are becoming increasingly aware of the potential that sailing adventures can have as part of an integrated approach to adventure activities for young people.

Sailing Adventures for young people at risk

A significant provider of sailing adventures for young people at risk in Britain is Fairbridge. During 1988 and 1989 I was employed on their sailing vessel ' Spirit of Merseyside'. This enterprise represents many of the best features of specifically targeted provision in Britain. The programme of voyages was planned in close liaison with the many city based teams. This ensured that the teams could offer an input into the design of voyages and suggest desirable outcomes to compliment their land based courses. The participants were usually given sufficient information and support from their team to ensure that attendance on the sailing voyage was a positive experience. This demonstrates that preparation and follow up are important to the medium term success of these experiences (see Greenaway 1993).

Voyages were often combined with other adventure activities such as mountain climbing and hill walking. The residential centre at Applecross in Scotland provided a summer course of expeditions with the vessel. These included in 1989, a Skye short expedition where 12 young people sailed to Skye, climbed a local peak and spent a night bivy before returning to sail the vessel back to the mainland. This combines the power of land based adventure with sailing to create a memorable voyage for the participants.

Conclusion

Sail training and adventure opportunities in Britain have developed over the last twenty years to offer a vast and varied resource for youth workers and adventure practitioners. In the last ten years providers of sailing adventures have become more receptive to the modern ideas of personal and social development, and many have adapted their programmes or approaches to embrace modern ideas. However this has been achieved while retaining the tradition of seafaring that has proved so alluring for generations of young people. Sailing adventures cannot offer to solve all of the problems facing young people in contemporary Britain. However, if used within the context of wider supportive youth work programme it offers unique challenges and experiences for personal and social development. It is the responsibility of the referring agency to ensure that the most appropriate setting is selected and this, as demonstrated in this analysis, requires careful consideration of diverse factors.

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